Y2K Healthcare Questions

Q. What is the Y2K bug and why should I be concerned?

A. The Year 2000 (Y2K) date processing problem stems from the historical and widespread use throughout the computer and information system industry of using 2-digit rather than 4-digit numbers in software, and hardware. For example, many software programs and computer chips record the year 1998 as "98." This approach will work until the Year 2000 when the "00" may be read as 1900 instead of 2000, potentially inducing computer failures as computer programs are unable to distinguish between the two dates. We are fixing our systems to make sure they will operate properly when the calendar changes.

You should not be concerned. Rather you should be aware of the issue and the steps the Military Health System has taken to ensure that your healthcare is not adversely affected by the date changeover.

Q. What should I do to prepare for the Year 2000 as it relates to my healthcare?

A. You should rest assured that if you or your family needs healthcare during the date changeover period, you will receive it.

There are a few simple things that you can do to prepare for the Year 2000 as it relates to your healthcare.

Check any biomedical equipment you may have at home, to ensure it is Year 2000 compliant. We recommend that you contact the manufacturer directly or use a manufacturer provided website to obtain additional information on how to make their equipment compliant.
Check your family members anniversary date for enrollment in TRICARE. Re-enrollment will be automatic in all Regions this summer, but check the date to ensure your family remains enrolled.
Make certain that your correct address is in the Defense Enrollment and Eligibility Reporting System (DEERS) database. You can do this on-line by going to the TRICARE website, at www.tricare.osd.mil, click on TRICARE Beneficiary Information, then click on DEERS address change.

Q. Will my ability to receive care be interrupted by the Y2K bug?

A. We do not expect any interruptions in our ability to deliver quality healthcare due to the Y2K problem. The Military Health System is engaged in a coordinated effort to identify and resolve potential Y2K problems to ensure that healthcare delivery is not adversely affected prior to, on, and after January 1, 2000.

Q. What is likely to happen to computer systems at midnight December 31, 1999?

A. We expect all Military Health System computer systems to function normally at midnight December 31, 1999. However, should problems arise with

any of our computer systems, we have a comprehensive contingency and continuity of operations plan to immediately address and resolve these issues.

Q. What is Department of Defense Health Affairs doing to correct the Y2K problem?

A. We are proactively meeting the Y2K date challenge. Since 1996, we've had a dedicated team of experts working on a five-phased Y2K program to ensure the safety and continuity of healthcare services. The five phases are awareness, assessment, renovation, validation, and implementation. This team is tracking 87 centrally managed information systems for Y2K compliance.

To date:
   100% of the Mission Critical Systems have been certified Y2K compliant
   97% of the Non-Mission Critical Systems have been certified Y2K compliant
   99% of the medical equipment has been certified Y2K compliant

Q. Will the Military Health System have all of the problems related to Y2K fixed prior to January 1, 2000?

A. Yes. In fact, all of the Military Health System Y2K health-mission-critical systems were certified for Y2K compliance on December 31, 1998. All other non-mission critical systems are now undergoing a rigorous testing and certification process. Additional backup systems and processes required for sustaining healthcare delivery are in place for all critical areas in the event of a Y2K failure.

Q. Is there a chance that the Y2K bug will jeopardize the health or well-being of anyone seeking care in the Military Health System?

A. We are confident that the Military Health System will continue to provide quality healthcare to all of our beneficiaries through the transition to the year 2000. Healthcare information systems, biomedical devices, and facility infrastructure components throughout the Military Health System are being fixed and tested to ensure that the two-digit date fields will not corrupt data and induce system failures.

Q. Will my medical records be lost at the turn of the century?

A. No. Your medical records are in "paper-copy" -- therefore they will not be affected by potential computer problems associated with the Y2K bug.

Q. Will my care at a TRICARE contractor be affected by the Y2K bug?

A. All TRICARE contractors have taken the appropriate measures to protect their systems. We have performed operational testing with TRICARE contractors, pharmaceutical supply vendors and the Defense Enrollment Eligibility Reporting System (DEERS), Y2K-compliant systems that support the

critical functions.

Individual doctors' offices, civilian hospitals and other healthcare providers in our TRICARE networks are responsible for ensuring their own Y2K compliance. This is true throughout the country. We suggest that when you visit your network providers ask them what they have done to become Y2K compliant and when they expect to achieve that compliance.

Q. Are the TRICARE contractors taking the same measures as the MHS to protect their systems?

A. Yes. All TRICARE contractors are taking steps to protect their systems. Senior level Military Health System officials are meeting monthly with the TRICARE contractors to monitor their progress in meeting the target date. To verify the successful remediation of the contractor's systems, we have included these contractor systems in the Military Health System testing.

Q. Is there a coordinated effort to correct problems between Department of Defense and TRICARE contractors?

A. Yes. The Military Health System and our TRICARE partners are actively monitoring our Y2K progress and working together to ensure the continuity of healthcare into the year 2000.

Q. Will I have difficulty having my prescriptions filled? Will the mail order pharmacy be affected?

A. You should not experience any problems having your prescriptions filled. We are working closely with our mail order pharmacy contractor to ensure continued, uninterrupted service. We are also taking steps to ensure adequate supplies of pharmaceuticals are available at all of our Military Treatment Facilities.

Q. If I'm deployed overseas or to an area of military conflict at the turn of the century, will my ability to receive medical care be affected? What about receiving care at foreign medical facilities?

A. We are confident that we will continue to provide quality healthcare to deployed personnel and their families. All Military Treatment Facilities' Commanders are required to certify the Y2K compliance of their Military Treatment Facilities once all remediation and testing has been completed. In addition, the military services' medical departments and overseas Military Treatment Facilities' Commanders are identifying and assessing the Y2K readiness of foreign referral partners, and developing a Y2K plan of action for assuring uninterrupted healthcare.

Q. Do you have a backup plan if something fails at the turn of the century?

A. The Military Health System Year 2000 (Y2K) Automated Information System (AIS) Contingency and Continuity of Operations Planning Guide has been developed to address these issues. The guide requires automated system

managers and facility commanders to prepare contingency and problem management procedures for each automated system. These plans provide procedures for problem solving and continuity of operations. Each Department of Defense medical facility is also developing a site-specific continuity of operations plan, which will be tested before the end of the summer. The Military Health System is also developing a TRICARE Year 2000 Continuity of Operations Plan, which will address alternate procedures to be used by our TRICARE partners in the event of a Y2K failure.

From http://www.tricare.osd.mil/y2k/faq_bene.html